



The Field Artillery Museum is preparing for its “grand opening” in June, in concert with the Fires Support Seminar. (Photo by COL Frank J. Siltman, Fires Center of Excellence, Fort Sill, Oklahoma)

US Army Field Artillery Museum Makes History

The Fort Sill museum system is at the threshold of tremendous change. For most of the history of the Field Artillery (FA) Branch’s association with Fort Sill, Oklahoma, there has not been a “stand-alone” Field Artillery museum dedicated to the Army’s longest continuously serving branch. For years, the Fort Sill Museum has been a function of the Fort Sill National Historic Landmark, depicting the history of the frontier Army, Southwest Oklahoma and the FA Branch. That is changing as the US Army Field Artillery Museum is preparing for its “grand opening” in June, in concert with the Fires Support Seminar. The museum is located just west of the Old Post Corral along Randolph Road.

The Museum. Fort Sill will have two separate museums with the National Historic Landmark and the US Army Field Artillery Museum. Then in 2011, as

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part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, the Air Defense Artillery Museum will open, giving Fort Sill a third museum.

In June 2008, the new building for the FA Museum was completed as part of BRAC construction and was turned over to the Fort Sill Museum. The interior exhibit planning was completed and coordinated with the Center of Military History and the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Chief of Museums. In the fall of 2008, interior construction of exhibits began, pieces were moved, and refurbishing began on those pieces.

In December 2008, Gordon Blaker arrived as the first Curator/Director of the FA Museum. He began to review plans and develop a concept to meet the

target date of the grand opening in June. This was a complex process, but Blaker designed a holistic approach.

The FA Museum will depict the history of the US Army FA from its inception under Henry Knox in December 1775, through today. The FA Museum currently is developing exhibits, endeavoring to employ interactive and multimedia techniques to tell the story of the FA in US military history. Although there will be some static-piece displays, even those will include figures and displays that place the pieces in the context of history, the evolution of warfare and, most importantly, the Soldiers that served them.

Outside Partnerships. This is a work in progress as the museum prepares for the grand opening, but even that will not be the final product. The FA Museum will be a “living entity” that will change and



An artist's rendition of the Field Artillery and Air Defense Artillery Museum complex slated for completion in 2011. (Courtesy of Burns and McDonnell)

improve, leveraging technology to present the story and complement the exhibits. This will be an on-going effort, requiring partnership with FA units, the FA Association and the Friends of Fort Sill.

The relationship with outside organizations is critical to the way ahead. The Friends of Fort Sill is a volunteer, private organization that has been formed to support Fort Sill's museums. This group is comprised of members of the community, businesses, retirees and Army spouses. The Friends of Fort Sill works with the

currently is being reviewed, and pieces are being identified for refurbishment. Many pieces already have been moved for inclusion in the new museum exhibits, but there are plans for the new Artillery Park just north of the new museum. This will result in Artillery pieces being removed from static displays and placed in the new Artillery Park.

While some will be on static display, many will be placed in contextual exhibits. For example, a Vietnam-era piece will be placed in a reproduction of a firebase. This is an extension of efforts by the museum to put the history of the FA in context in the presentation to educate the public and FA students on

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community and industry to gain support for the museums financially, materially and with volunteers. This partnership is a critical, cooperative effort to advance the museums and history; to educate people about Fort Sill, the FA, and the Army heritage; and to outreach to the community.

Other Initiatives. Another venue to obtain support is by reviving an older program. FA units are being engaged to identify weapons systems tied to unit heritage and then associate the units with the display of those pieces with some level of sponsorship. This will include exhibits in the museum, in the new Artillery Park, as well as helping units with the maintenance of pieces displayed in unit areas not belonging to the museum. These efforts, tied to a volunteer program, are essential to helping the museum achieve the short-term goals—especially refurbishing and developing displays, but also in sustaining the museum in the long term.

Old Cannon Walk. The Old Cannon Walk near the Old Post Quadrangle

the Branch's heritage.

National Historic Landmark. All of these changes are not just for the FA museum, but also for the National Historic Landmark as well. By bringing in an FA Museum curator to focus on branch-specific history, the National Historic Landmark Curator, Towana Spivey, can focus on the Fort Sill's history and its rich role in US Army and American history.

Although not common knowledge, Fort Sill is the most complete and well-preserved frontier Army post in the US. While there are many historic frontier forts, most have reconstructions or missing buildings. By virtue of Fort Sill being a constantly operational post, it has been preserved, offering a unique view into our nation's history and the frontier Army. The National Historic Landmark will continue to evolve with new exhibits on the history of the Southwest and the restoration of buildings.

ADA Museum. The third aspect of the new museum program is the Air Defense

Artillery Museum's move to Fort Sill. The ADA facility is scheduled to break ground in 2010, with the building scheduled for completion by the fall of 2011. The ADA staff is working with Fort Sill on all of the planning, the moving of artifacts, and the design of the museum and exhibits. The ADA Museum will have its own director/curator.

These three museums will make Fort Sill unique in the Army. The museum complex and campus will bring together the history of Fort Sill, the frontier Army, Southwest Oklahoma and the two proud branches of FA and ADA. This will create a museum campus unequalled in the Army and a significant center of Army heritage.

To oversee this program, the Commanding General, Fires Center of Excellence, is planning to establish a directorate of museums and military history to coordinate and synchronize efforts. This directorate also will work with TRADOC, the Center of Military History and outside organizations to advance the purposes of education, outreach, historic preservation and telling the Army's story. Hopefully, this will be seen as a "best practice" by TRADOC and the Army, and posture Fort Sill for the future to maximize the potential that these unique facilities provide to the Army and the nation.

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